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# U.S. drafts refugee emergency storm plan

By ERIC SCHMITT
The New York Times

WASHINGTON — The threat of seasonal hurricanes in the Caribbean has prompted U.S. military planners to draft an emergency plan to shelter or evacuate tens of thousands of Cuban and Haitian refugees living in tent cities at the Guantanamo Bay naval base.

The base has room in hardened bunkers for 14,000 people, but 40,000 Cubans and Haitians will be detained there by the end of this weekend. The Pentagon says the population could grow to more than 60,000 in the next few weeks.

So military planners at the U.S. Atlantic Command in Norfolk, Va., which operates the refugee camps, are scrambling to prepare plans to charter cruise ships and commercial jetliners in case they have to move a population the size of Niagara Falls, N.Y., on 48 hours' notice.

"They're doing the maximum they can do, but they've got a big problem on their hands, that's for sure," said Bob Sheets, director of the National Hurricane Center in Coral Gables, who is advising the Pentagon on hurricane trends.

From now through November, Sheets said, tropical storms form every three to five days that have the potential to grow into killer hurricanes, like Hurricane Andrew of August 1992, which devastated South Florida and many Caribbean islands. The chances of large storms diminish after mid-October, he said.

In one sense, the Pentagon is hoping history is on its side. The last major hurricanes to blow through Guantanamo Bay were Flora in 1963, Cleo in 1964 and Inez in 1966, but the base did not suffer. "Gitmo has never suffered any direct hurricane strike," said Capt. Bill Pine, the Atlantic Command's chief weather officer, using the base's nickname.

He said that the nearby island of Hispaniola shields the southeastern tip of Cuba, where the base is located.

As of Saturday, meteorologists were not predicting any major storms headed in the base's direction.

Still, Sheets said, "there's nothing physically that says Gitmo is immune to hurricane activity." He said that Hurricane Flora whipped around Cuba for four days in 1963, causing massive damage elsewhere on the island.

Rear Adm. Thomas B. Fargo, director of operations for the Atlantic Command, said that 48 hours before a hurricane is predicted to hit the Guantanamo Bay area, the military would put into effect a four-part plan that would safely shelter or evacuate all refugees at the base.

The military would move 14,000 people to empty ammunition bunkers dug into the sides of the rugged hills on base. The shelters can withstand winds of more than 160 miles per hour.

Two cruise ships in Guantanamo Bay, chartered to shelter U.S. troops working at the camps, would be emptied and filled with about 8,000 refugees. The ships would sail south and out to sea to avoid the storm. Other Navy ships might also be tapped to ferry refugees..

The military would also charter several large commercial jetliners like 747s or L-1011s along with 24 Air Force C-141 cargo planes to fly about 6,000 people a day to other sites, probably to some of the countries that have agreed to take in Haitians and Cubans temporarily.

With two days' notice, planners estimate they could fly out about 12,000 people. When the storm passed, the refugees would be flown back to Guantanamo Bay.

As a last resort, the military would use existing buildings on the base, such as schoolhouses, warehouses and maintenance sheds. Those buildings are not hardened but can withstand winds of up to about 100 mph. Fargo estimated the buildings could hold about 30,000 people.

To avoid costly false alarms, the military has decided to wait until a storm is 48 hours away before putting the emergency plan into effect.

## FOR INFORMATION

**BY COMPUTER**

An electronic list of the Cuban refugees being detained at Guantanamo Bay is available on the Broward County Free-Net. You can access Free-Net from any Broward County public library branch or from your computer. Set your modem for 8-N-1, full duplex, VT100 emulation and speeds up to 9600 bps and dial 305-765-4332. Choose Free-Net from the menu. If you're not a Free-Net member, type "visitor" when it asks for a login. Once you've logged in, type "cubans" from any prompt. Follow the instructions in selection No. 1 ("About the refugee list"). Internet users can reach Free-Net via telnet at bcfreenet.seflin.lib.fl.us.

**BY TELEPHONE**

For updates on the Cuba crisis, call Source Line and enter:
- **6114:** Breaking news.
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